PROJECT 50 and Growing

A Collaborative and Cost Effective Approach Towards Housing the Most Vulnerable Chronically Homeless

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Background

Los Angeles has long been known for its large number of homeless persons living on Skid Row. Within this group, the County of Los Angeles identified the most vulnerable, chronically homeless individuals, both veteran and non-veteran. In order to best address this problem, PROJECT 50 was created in December of 2007 as a two year demonstration project. Traditionally, services are available for the homeless from an assortment of agencies on or servicing the Skid Row area. Each, however, with their own intake forms and procedures sometimes further disenfranchising the homeless.

The purpose of Project 50 was to identify, then rapidly place into permanent supportive housing, the 50 most vulnerable of the chronically homeless people who have been sleeping on the streets of Skid Row the longest. These are the people practically everyone said were "service resistant" and would never get off the streets. An extensive collaboration, including the County and City of Los Angeles, Common Ground of New York, Los Angeles County Sheriff, Los Angeles Police Dept., Probation, Public Counsel, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, Skid Row Housing Trust, non-profits and the VA was formed.

Under the direction and with the spearheading of Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, 24 agencies/ organizations/ offices joined together to demonstrate that vulnerable chronically homeless persons are willing to and can rapidly move from the "Streets to Home." An extensive multi-agency collaboration, utilizing a housing first approach coupled with an Integrated Supportive Services Team was implemented. The project's initial phase included the creation of a registry according to mortality risk and length of homelessness. The innovative Vulnerability Index Survey tool developed by Common Ground was administered. Frequent characteristics of the vulnerable chronically homeless clients of Project 50 included higher utilization of emergency rooms and hospitals, as well as multiple arrests leading to incarceration in the LA County jails. Nine out of the 50 clients were identified as Veterans.

Measurable Outcomes / Results

First year:

- 96% of the clients who were offered housing accepted
- 50 clients were placed into housing, with 88% remaining in housing
- 56% increased their benefits
- 73% estimated reduction in hospitalization costs since housed; health outcomes improved
- 95% of clients diagnosed with a mental illness are in treatment
- 61% of clients with active substance abuse are addressing their addiction
- 10% of those addressing substance abuse issues became abstinent upon being housed
- 80% reduction in days of incarceration with a concomitant reduction in jail costs
- Unprecedented collaboration across 24 public and private agencies.
- Significant cost avoidance of hospital and jail costs when clients are living in permanent supportive housing.
- Project is being replicated in other LA County cities (including Santa Monica, Venice, West Hollywood, Long Beach and San Fernando Valley)
- Project is undergoing expansion to Project 500

Lessons Learned / Implications for the Field

No one entity can adequately serve the vulnerable chronically homeless. Collaboration and coordination is essential to address the complex needs of chronically homeless persons. Both the VA and the local agencies and government linked their commonalities in order to provide services in an expedited and coordinated fashion, which has proven to be cost effective.